

March 17, 2006

Dear Friend:

As we brace for a summer of extreme fire danger and uncertainty, it is important that New Mexicans are prepared to prevent harmful fires.

At the right time and under certain conditions, fire can be a tool and benefit the ecosystem. Unfortunately, due to the dry winter and persisting drought conditions in many parts of the state, New Mexico is under extreme fire threat and danger.

Many factors contribute to the intensity of wildfires that cannot be controlled such as wind, weather, hot temperatures, and drought conditions. There are, however, many preventive actions that we as conscientious citizens can take to prevent a fire from igniting.

Though the fire season in New Mexico typically begins in April, 26 counties in New Mexico are already enforcing fire restrictions and closures. The restrictions now in observance prohibit campfires and limit open burning. Smoking is allowed only in enclosed vehicles, buildings and developed recreational sites. Fireworks are also prohibited on all state and private property covered by timber, brush, grass, grain or other flammable vegetation. We as New Mexicans must be vigilant in observing these restrictions, and urge our neighbors to do the same.

For a full list of counties affected by restrictions, and a complete list of the restrictions and closures please visit the Southwest Coordination website at http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/fire/information/firerestrictions/nm/restrictions_nm.htm. You may also call the toll-free Fire Restrictions Hotline at 1-877-864-6985 before planning a trip to a National Forest, National Park, or other public lands.

Earlier this month, I toured the Santa Fe watershed with Santa Fe National Forest officials to view the conditions and potential for wildfire first hand. What I saw was a potential tinderbox that if ignited could engulf our forest in flames. As the top democrat on the Forest Subcommittee and a concerned New Mexican, I would like to remind you to please stop to think before you act, and encourage others to do the same. A single spark can ignite dry grasses or pine needles that may start of a wildfire and put our state and lives at risk.

Very Truly Yours,

Tom Udall
Member of Congress